



PRESS RELEASE

Governor Baker Holds Roundtable Discussion on Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership

First event of a statewide education series to highlight key programs and initiatives aimed at delivering a quality education to all students

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SPRINGFIELD — Governor Charlie Baker joined Education Secretary James Peyser, Mayor Domenic Sarno and Senator Eric Lesser to visit Forest Park Middle School and meet with teachers and administrators to hear about the schools’ successful turnaround efforts as part of the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership. The partnership is finishing its second academic year and uses an innovative approach voluntarily adopted by the school district in an effort to improve underperforming schools.

This visit marks the first in a series of events to highlight the administration’s education programs, initiatives and funding opportunities from early education to college level, all aimed at providing a quality and affordable education for every student in the Commonwealth.

“Our administration is committed to providing every child with access to a world-class education system in Massachusetts and we are proud to have proposed increasing spending on local aid to our schools by more than \$300 million,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “Implementing the empowerment zone approach is an effective tool for certain districts to give teachers and administrators the ability to make the best decisions and create the best learning environment for their students, and we look forward to partnering with the Legislature to replicate this approach for other schools in need.”

Governor Baker was joined by Secretary James Peyser, Senator Eric Lesser, Superintendent Daniel Warwick, Mayor Dominic Sarno, principals, and teachers for a roundtable discussion on the advancements made during the past two years as an empowerment zone.

The Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership allows school leaders to make decisions around scheduling, curriculum, budgeting, and hiring that best fit their individual schools, rather than allowing all decisions to be made at the district level.

“The success of the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership is based on local school leaders’ autonomy and accountability, along with input and guidance from local stakeholders,” **Lt. Governor Karyn Polito said.** “We are committed to supporting each community’s efforts to provide the best opportunities for students to create academic success in every zipcode.”

In 2014, Springfield Public Schools partnered with Empower Schools, a nonprofit organization that works with communities to improve schools and boost academic results for students. Nine middle schools and two high schools are in the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, which is overseen by an independent joint city-state board.

During his State of the Commonwealth address in January, Governor Baker highlighted the empowerment zone approach in Springfield as a promising way to improve struggling schools, and said he supports legislation filed by Senator Eric Lesser (D- East Longmeadow) and Rep. Alice Peisch (D- Wellesley) that would give school districts more flexibility to turn around underperforming schools by creating “Innovation Zones,” similar to what Springfield schools did.

“As Massachusetts looks for ways to improve struggling schools and close the achievement gap, the empowerment zone model holds promise as a strategy for giving educators the flexibility and support they need, within a stable framework for public accountability for results,” **Education Secretary James Peyser said.**

“I’m grateful to have Governor Baker in Springfield to see first-hand the great work our teachers, administrators, students and parents are doing to improve our students’ education at Forest Park Middle School and our other schools,” **Senator Eric Lesser said.**

“We are honored to have the Governor and Secretary Peyser visit Springfield and one of our empowerment schools. I think the work being done at the empowerment schools could be model across the state and country,” **Springfield School Superintendent Daniel Warwick said.** “This is a model that gives schools a different opportunity to make the radical changes necessary to turnaround schools.”

The schools in the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership are governed by a seven-member board that includes Mayor Dominic Sarno, School Superintendent Daniel Warwick and School Committee Vice

Chair Chris Collins, as well John Davis, James Morton, Beverly Holmes and Chris Gabrieli, who chairs the empowerment zone board.

After the first year, the majority of schools in the Zone showed improvements in three of the state’s primary performance measures, including percentage of students meeting standards, composite performance index (CPI) and student growth percentile (SGP).

“I am very happy Governor Baker visited the Empowerment Zone today. The Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership has turned out to be a wonderful option to address the needs of struggling schools,” **said Chris Collins, who is a school committee member and on the board of the Empowerment Zone.** “All indicators show these schools are all improving, some at a faster pace than others, but all making the kinds of improvements we are looking for. I think we are all excited about the potential for this type of approach for schools throughout the state, and the country.”

The Baker-Polito Administration has proposed increasing spending on all K-12 schools by more than \$318 million dollars since taking office in 2015. Earlier this year, after years of nominal increases for providers, Governor Baker proposed a 6% rate increase for early education providers, worth more than \$28 million dollars, and includes plans to increase annual support for infant and toddler providers by more than \$9 million. Massachusetts was recently ranked #1 in the country for education by U.S. News and World Report, and also tops the list for best performing states on Advanced Placement Exams.

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